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INTEREST ON EPF TO BE CUT TO FOUR-DECADE LOW OF 8.1%

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation on Saturday proposed slashing the rate to its lowest since 1977-78

WILL HURT SAVINGS OF 6 CR PROFESSIONALS

The decision by the EPFO's Central Board of Trustees (CBT), days after election results were announced in five states, will affect six million salaried-professionals. A member of the CBT said the decision was taken due to difficulty faced by the EPFO in generating good returns from its investments. While the corpus is up by 13%, interest income is up only 8%

EPFO SELLS SOME OF ITS INVESTMENTS

- "For FY 2022, EPFO decided to liquidate some of its investment and the interest rate recommended is a result of combined income from debt and equity investments," a statement by the EPFO said
- The EPFO invests 85% of its accruals in debt and 15% in equity
- The new rate has to be approved by the finance ministry P10

8%

WAS THE INTEREST ON EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND IN 1977-78

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Russian forces tighten noose around Kyiv, seize suburbs of Mariupol

A Russian shell hits an apartment building in Mariupol on Friday night | AP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

UKRAINIAN capital Kyiv on Saturday braced for the much-feared Russian offensive to take the capital, as the enemy troops surrounded the city and stepped up airstrikes on its outskirts. South of Kyiv, the port city of Mariupol also saw intense fighting with Russian forces taking control of parts of its suburbs.

The northwest parts of the capital, including Irpin and Bucha, have already endured days of heavy bombardment while Russian armoured vehicles are advancing on the northeastern edge.

With the sound of the enemy's boots growing louder, the Ukrainian forces as well as civilians who have taken up arms to defend their city, are gearing up for the final assault. The capital city's mayor reported that every street and every house is being fortified.

Satellite images on Saturday showed buildings on fire as Russia bombed cities near Kyiv as it made its final push to take the capital.

Meanwhile, in Mariupol, a mosque reportedly sheltering more than 80 people, including children, came under heavy shelling. Aid workers on Saturday warned of an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in the port city, which has been without water, gas and power supply for much of the past two weeks after being cut off from the rest of the country.

Beyond Kyiv and Mariupol, the cities of Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy remained encircled and continued to suffer heavy Russian shelling.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said 1,300 Ukrainian soldiers have died fighting the Russians since the attacks began on February 24.

As the West rushed to supply arms to Ukraine, Russia warned it will hit the convoys carrying the weapons. P9

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DIGITAL AGE

Public can now fill in and submit census data online

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE public can now fill up and submit census data online as per the Census (Amendment) Rules, 2022, notified by the Centre late on Friday.

"A person may fill up, complete, and submit the census schedule through self-enumeration," according to the rules notified by the Union home ministry.

As per the new rules, self-enumeration means "filling up, completion and submission of census schedule by respondents themselves."

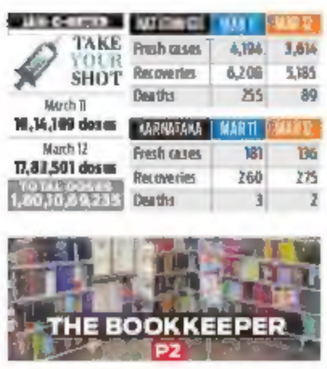
In Rule 5 of the census rules, which deals with the publishing of the census statistics through publications of magnetic media, the word "media" has been replaced with "electronic or any other media".

A clause has been added to Rule 6 to allow filling up the census schedule through self-enumeration.

Rule 9 has also been amended to include, "print, electronic and social media" as means to increase the publicity of the census exercise. Earlier, the rule mentioned only "radio, audio-visuals and posters."

House visits by the enumerators to collect census data will continue as in the past.

The census operation continues to be on hold. The housing listing phase of the census was to be carried out across the country from April 1 to September 30, 2020, but got postponed due to Covid-19.



Crucial CWC meeting today

G-23 leaders to demand change in leadership; Gandhi loyalists question dissenters' intent

RICHA SHARMA @ New Delhi

AFTER the shocking poll debacle, battle lines are drawn in the Congress between those supporting the Nehru-Gandhis and those questioning their continuing at the helm ahead of the Congress Working Committee meeting. The CWC meeting, scheduled to take place at Sunday 4 pm, is likely to see fireworks as the G-23 leaders are determined to pose tough questions to the high command and seek a change in leadership and immediate reforms in the party. Gandhi loyalists, meanwhile, have rallied behind the family saying the party cannot survive without the Gandhis.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi has convened the CWC, the party's highest decision-making body, to dwell upon the party's dismal performance in the assembly elections. The meeting is expected to be noisy as Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi's leadership skills and choice of core team members will come under the scanner after the party drew a blank in five states. A senior party leader said it has to be seen if heads will roll at the CWC or it will end up without fixing responsibility and taking concrete steps. Meanwhile, the party categorically denied rumours of the Gandhis' resignation.

The tone for the meeting has already been set with family loyalists targeting G23 leaders like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Manish Tewari and others, suggesting they had done nothing to strengthen the party other than publicly criticising the leadership at repeated intervals. AICC general secretary Tariq Anwar said some people just looked for opportunities to attack the party when it is passing through a tough phase. "How can they be party's well-wishers?" he said.

Karnataka Congress incharge D K Shivakumar defended the leadership saying that without the Gandhis, the Congress cannot stay united.

Calling for inner-party democracy, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, part of G23, in an article Saturday wrote that it would help if the party took steps to promote inner-party democracy and then rein in internal dissent. "Seek the views of a wide cross-section of party stalwarts, not just a favored few," he wrote. He also suggested that the party should explore pragmatic coalitions.

BJP eyes becoming the aam aadmi's party

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

BUOYED by the impressive win in state polls, the BJP now wants to blunt the Opposition's charge that it's pro-corporate party by rebranding itself as a pro-poor party ahead of the bigger battle in 2024.

The nationwide perception change seeks to expand the party's footprint by building on its 'poor-friendly' image. The BJP is also learnt to be working on a plan to have a stronger foothold among the poor, women and the youth. In the just-concluded assembly elections, women and youths are believed to have played a key role in the party's return to power in four states.

According to sources, schemes for farmers, women and youths, with focus on employment generation, education and economic empowerment are on the cards.

"We have always been a party of 'aam janata' (common people) contrary to the false perception created against us. The results of recent Assembly elections have once again proved this. But we have thought of doing more to prove our people-friendly credentials through our performances and policies," said a BJP leader, adding that a comprehensive plan to falsify the opposition-created narrative would soon be in the offing. Senior leaders in the party's think-tank are working on chalking out a comprehensive strategy in this regard.

Sources said the saffron party is also considering improving its perception amongst the minorities ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "Some minority-specific schemes and policies can be expected soon," a source said.

The move comes at a time when regional parties, with strong grassroots support in the states they are based in, are making aggressive attempts to mount a joint challenge to the BJP in 2024.

CM IBRAHIM QUITS CONGRESS

Bengaluru: Senior Congress leader and MLC CM Ibrahim on Saturday said he has resigned from the primary membership of the party and also the MLC post. "Being a senior leader I could not speak to you or Rahul Gandhi directly and place the facts before you... it had to be routed through in-charge general secretaries and it is well known to you how they respond...," he explained in a letter to Sonia Gandhi. P6

Maternal mortality dips, state ranking improves

CHETANA BELAGERE
@Bengaluru

KARNATAKA has jumped from 9th to 8th rank in maternal mortality rate among states in the country. Experts, although appreciative of this, say it is still not enough as the numbers continue to be the highest in Karnataka among the five southern States.

The report released by the Ministry of Home Affairs revealed that Karnataka's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has declined from 92 per lakh live births in 2015-17 to 83 per lakh live births in 2017-19.

The MMR is a significant indicator that defines the public health of a state. It determines the progress made by states in saving the lives of pregnant women during pregnancy, childbirth and lactation.

But several experts working in the field say this is not enough. Karnataka has reduced sustainable development goals set by the United Nations at 70 per lakh live births that has to be achieved by 2030. "There is definitely an improvement in the numbers. The success has to be attributed to institutional deliveries, better antenatal services and better access to contraceptive choices. The better implementation of initiatives like Janani Sudarshan Yojana (JSY), Surakshit Matritva Aashwashan (SUMAN), Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK), Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA), Chiranjivi Yojana, Mamtha Ghar and others have helped reduce MMR," explains Dr Soumya Sangamesh, consultant, infertility specialist, BGS Gleneagles Global Hospital.

But Karnataka is still highest among the southern states, with Kerala with an MMR of 30, Telangana 56, and Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh both at 58. The survey was done in 2017-19 before the Covid 19 pandemic. P3

K'taka's numbers still highest in South

- Karnataka jumps from 9th to 8th rank in maternal mortality rate
- Karnataka's Maternal Mortality Ratio has declined from 92 per lakh live births in 2015-17 to 83 per lakh live births in 2017-19
- But it is still highest among five southern states
- Kerala with an MMR of 30, Telangana 56, and TN and AP both at 58 fare better than Karnataka

PUTIN'S CLONES

Even after the Soviet Union fell, many former Communist countries continue to be ruled by admiring tyrants friendly to President Vladimir Putin's Russia

PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE WITH THIS ISSUE

BJP may start campaign in state after PM's April visit

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

WITH Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting Karnataka in April 2022 to launch various initiatives and programmes, the state Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is all set to begin its campaign early for the 2023 Assembly polls.

On one side, BJP state leaders, including Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai and former CM BS Yediyurappa, are expected to tour different parts of the state after the present legislature session, while on the other side, national leaders will start focusing on Karnataka as the Assembly polls are just a year away.

BJP sources said that the state government has one year to implement its schemes to sway voters. P6

EXPRESS READ

Pakistan demands joint probe into accidental firing of missile

New Delhi: Pakistan has sought explanations from India over "technical malfunction" which "led to the accidental firing of a missile". Pakistan has demanded a joint probe into the incident to establish the facts. P8

Alliance Air aircraft overshoots runway at Jabalpur airport

New Delhi: An Alliance Air flight from Delhi carrying 55 passengers overshot the runway by 10 m while landing at the Jabalpur airport on Saturday. None of the 55 passengers or five crew members was injured. P8

IT'S A FAN FEST AT CHINNASWAMY STADIUM

ASHIM SUNAM @ Bengaluru

THE scenes outside the M Chinnaswamy Stadium drew a visual narrative on a sunny Saturday afternoon.

Fans, who stood in long queues to get inside the venue with painted faces and waving Tricolours, dominated the proceedings as Bengaluru geared up for its first international cricket game — second Test between India and Sri Lanka — after the Covid pandemic. When buses carrying both the teams proceeded towards the main gate, fans cheered them on, showing their excitement, love and craze for the gentleman's game.

The atmosphere inside the stadium was no different with fans chanting their favourite players' names, including Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, from the stands.

Faf du Plessis to lead Royal Challengers

Bengaluru: The Royal Challengers Bangalore on Saturday appointed former South Africa national team skipper Faf du Plessis as their new captain for the upcoming edition of Indian Premier League. P11

With the venue hosting its first day-night Test match, the commentators and ground staff in pink Nehru jackets and polo neck tees also added colour. Even before the game began, chants of Kohli and Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) dominated proceedings as he walked towards the field.

As if that was not enough, the disk jockey (DJ) played some peppy music to liven the atmosphere. It was a great sight to see the Bengaluru crowd thronging the stadium for the longer format, which has declined in popularity over the years worldwide. P2

India's Shreyas Iyer (92) pulls on Day 1 of the second Test between India and Sri Lanka in Bengaluru on Saturday | AFP

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